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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 001271

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SUBJECT: VISIT TO GABODE PRISON

Classified By: Pol/Econ Erinn C. Reed for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (U) Summary: Pol/Econ, USLO NCO, and Pol Asst visited Djibouti's civil prison, Gabode, on September 23rd. Followed by a tour of the facilities, Pol/Econ discussed the conditions with the Director of the Prison, Mohamed Ismail. The following is reaction to the conditions and a brief overview of the conversation with Ismail. End Summary.

2. (C) The conditions at Gabode Prison were considerably better than Embassy staff expected to see based on the general impression from word on the street. That said, one can imagine that conditions were spruced up a bit in the two weeks between the Embassy's formal request to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and our actual visit. The prison grounds are all dirt and were fairly clean compared to some of the streets throughout Djibouti City. Buildings that inmates occupy have cement flooring, which was usually covered in dirt or mud. All areas have ceiling fans to cool them, except the infirmary which has the only air conditioner in the prison, but it has been broken for several months. The kitchen facilities are primitive and do not seem adequate for feeding 300 to 500 persons. Animals that are slaughtered in order to feed the prisoners wander freely around the prison compound. Trash is burned in the open, as is customary for most residents of Djibouti. Buildings are extremely dilapidated. There are four new buildings constructed by the Government of Djibouti that house male inmates doing shorter sentences. One of the four has a problem with its electrical wiring and therefore stands empty while the prison administrators wait for someone who can fix it. The main generator for the prison is broken, funds are not available in the prison budget to fix it.

3. (C) The women's facility is completely separated from the minors' and men's sections. During the visit there were 11 women in the general area and one in criminal confinement. Ismail said that she had to be housed away from the other women or she would likely injure or kill them. In the event of a woman having a child in prison, mother and child are kept together. The conditions in the women's facility are described as luxurious compared to other prison facilities. The women have no beds and sleep on blankets piled on the cement floor. There is a courtyard, a general sleeping quarters, a toilet and shower area immediately adjacent to the sleeping quarters and then the criminal confinement area, which has all of the above areas as well. The toilet consists merely of two holes in the ground, where the sanitation piping is located and a bucket of clean water to wash with.

4. (C) The infirmary appeared as dirty as other areas of the prison. Upon entering the infirmary compound, we saw as many as eight sheep exit the infirmary compound when the door was unlocked. There are beds in the infirmary, but the mattresses and bedding are extremely old and not clean. The shower and toilet facilities are well separated from the sleeping quarters but are essentially the same as described in the women's area. There were several people crowding around the courtyard and offices of the doctor. We were told that there a doctor is always on duty, as well as one nurse. Medicine is provided by the Ministry of Health. Donations from the Red Crescent were used in the past to supply the infirmary but that is no longer the case. The one air conditioner in the prison is in the supply room of the infirmary. It has been broken for several months. Medicines are stored at room temperature - which in Djibouti is roughly the same as the outside air, ranging from 85 degrees Fahrenheit in the winter months to 130 degrees Fahrenheit in the summer months. When asked if the supply of medicine was sufficient to treat the number of prisoners resident at Gabode in case of an emergency, the doctor said no, but conditioned that supplies were regularly replenished if they ran out.

5. (C) The kitchen is roughly in the same state. Food is brought in three times a day in order to prepare meals, according to Ismail. The visit was around the time that the mid-day meal was being prepared. The meat was being butchered in unsanitary conditions. The general food preparation area was as unhygienic as any other in the prison. Flies and insects swarmed the meat as it was being cut. The prison employs one cook who is aided by the prisoners. On a daily basis the prison prepares 70 kilograms of food per day. The

annual food budget is 13 million Djiboutian Francs (roughly 730,000 USD). Ismail said if the prisoner population remains at 350 the budget may stretch far enough when you factor out those that are being fed by their family. He said frequently there is a deficit by September. Many prisoners choose to have family bring them food, some even share with the other prisoners. Ismail said that many of the families of patients in the infirmary fully supply the food for their kin. He said the prison relies on a certain number to be fed by their family so that the rations provided by the prison can go far enough. Ismail commented that there is much strain placed on the prison system by illegal foreigners. He continued that there is the view in Djibouti that they are not Djiboutian, why should it be necessary to feed and house them and not send them home? But, he said, it is not right according to human rights - we must take care of anyone that is arrested in Djibouti. This places a great burden on the system.

16. (C) The prison seems to be capped at a budgetary and physical capacity to care for 350 persons. The annual budget does not adequately cover the expenses of the prison in terms of food, maintenance and administrative costs. The physical capacity is limited by buildings that aren't usable, but the prisoners' residence quarters seem crowded despite that. Ismail said that the prison depends on the twice annual amnesties - at Independence Day and Ramadan - to reduce the prisoner population. This year's independence day amnesty released 200 prisoners. Ismail said those that are released usually get arrested again soon after. The budget used to be 25 million DF annually but was cut to 13 million DF recently. The budget does not include salaries of the 16 person administrative staff, which is paid by the government, nor for any repairs or maintenance. Currently, there are 144 prisoners waiting for judgment out of the 350 total. 14 persons are in on "criminal" charges, one of which is serving a life sentence. According to Ismail, the law states that a Djiboutian must be tried within four months of arrest for minor infractions and foreigners within six months. Prisoners arrested on more severe criminal charges must be tried within two years of arrest. Ismail said the longest anyone has stayed without judgment is eight years - he did not specify the crime.

17. (C) The prison recently acquired two vehicles for daily transportation needs, though Ismail stressed that the prison needs its own ambulance. He commented that when a prisoner got sick in the past it was necessary to call the hospital and wait until the ambulance could get to them, sometimes several hours later. With the two vehicles it now has, prison officials can carry the prisoner to the hospital, but they must compete with the traffic like any other car.

18. (C) Ismail pressed the notion that the most important improvement needed for the prison was a separate medical treatment facility at the entrance of the prison to screen prisoners prior to placement with the rest of the prison population. He said that it is necessary to examine and diagnose prisoners for diseases like tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS and pneumonia to avoid wide spread contagion. Ismail was extremely concerned that the priorities were not in the right place. He commented "it is much better to have run down buildings with healthy people inside than brand new facilities with people spreading sickness."

RAGSDALE